A delegation of six Members of Parliament, led by Hon'ble Member of Parliament, Shri P. Upendra met Taiwanese authorities and raised the issue of detention of these two seamen during their recent visit to Taiwan. They are assured of positive help.

Linking of Indian Missions with Wireless System

2700. SHRI BHAGABAN MAJHI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to link all the Indian Missions with modern wireless system?

(b) if so, how many Missions are likely to be connected with modern wireless system during 1999-2000; and

(c) by which year every Indian Mission abroad would be provided with such facility?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) No Sir. However, the Ministry has implemented to project called High Frequency Radio Communication (HFRC) network with 22 Indian Missions abroad. This is intended for emergency communication purposes when the normal channels of communications are disrupted. It is not proposed to cover any additional Missions with this wireless system.

In addition, all Indian Missions and Posts are linked with headquarters and to each other by telephone, fax and telex and in most cases also by electronic mail.

(c) Does not arise.

Issues discussed in the SAARC conference

2701. SHRI SATISH CHANDRA SITARAM PRADHAN:
SHRI BHAGABAN MAJHI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether various issues were discussed in the last SAARC Conference;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Indo-Pak agreement has been made on preparing of a time-bound road map; and

(d) what other issues concerning Indo-Pak bilateral relation were discussed in the last SAARC Conference?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) The 21st Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers was held in Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka from 18 to 19 March, 1999. This was preceded by the meeting of the SAARC Standing Committee at the official level from 15 to 17 March, 1999. The Council reviewed the progress made in implementing the decisions of the Tenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo in July 1998 with a special focus on regional economic cooperation.

The Ministers approved a modification in the SAPTA Rules of Origin which would reduce the minimum Domestic Content requirement by 10%. They noted with appreciation that the Third Round of SAPTA had been concluded and that the Fourth Round of SAPTA negotiations was to commence in July 1999. They also noted that the Group of Experts had been set up to commence negotiations on a SAFTA Treaty and emphasised the importance of having the Treaty in place by the year 2001.

The Council agreed that the SAARC countries should work closely with a view to identifying issues of common concern and seeking a convergence in strategies well in advance of the forthcoming Third WTO Conference.

The Council also discussed the proposal for a SAARC Social Charter and agreed to constitute an Inter-Governmental Group to proceed with work on the Charter.

The Council approved an expansion of the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme to several new categories to facilitate contacts amongst the business community and cultural and educational institutions.